

Mel Kaye describes the CBI theater

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Chris: Walt Newman wrote me that you are interested in getting more information about the CBI. I arrived there 1945, as the war was winding down. I was there for a little more than 1 year, and left in 1946 to go to the Philippines. Perhaps I can give you a little overall information.

American troops were in India primarily to help push back the Japanese, who had invaded clear across China, and were entering India through the Assam Valley. The G.I.'s also were there to provide a supply line into China, to help the Chinese war against the Japanese. This was done by an airlift over the Himalayan mountains which was very dangerous. Many planes and crews were lost. Americans also built the Burma Road and the Ledo Road, which were truck routes. There were some amazing feats performed to carve out these roads. There also were pipe lines laid from the docks in Calcutta all the way through Burma to China that carried aviation gasoline.

General Eisenhower was in charge of the European operations, General MacArthur was in charge of the Pacific operations, and Lord Louis Mountbatten was in charge of the CBI—so all the American troops were under British command at the top. At that time, India was a colony of the British, and Pakistan had not yet split off from India. Right after the war ended, India invited the British out, and after some rioting, the British left. The Indians hated the British, but were friendly toward the Americans, because we had succeeded in getting rid of the British in our own country. So, there were hundreds of thousands of American troops in the CBI, doing all sorts of peripheral tasks, but the main objectives were as noted above.

I was with the 24th Combat Mapping Squadron, which flew photo mapping missions over various strategic areas in Burma and China. These photos were given to the Corps of Engineers who turned them into maps which were utilized for the war effort. We lost 33 men during that work.

I hope that this is of some value to you.
Mel Kaye